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Statement by Anonymous collected by Frank Smith on March 28, 2014

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General Information

Private or Public Statement? - Private

Statement Provider: Anonymous

Date: March 28, 2014

Location: Indian Island, Maine

Previous Statement? No

Statement Gatherer: Frank Smith

Support Person: N/A

Additional Individuals Present: Rachel George enters at end of first video

Recording Format: Video

Length of Recording: 25:03

Transcriber's Note:

This is an anonymous statement. Any redactions and alternations to the video have been done at the request of the individual in an effort to protect his/her identity.

Recording

FS: All right. I'm Frank Smith, and I'm a Statement Gatherer with the TRC, and you are:

A: I am [NAME REDACTED].

FS: Okay. And, um, we talked about this a minute ago, but, the consent form, you're going to decide on what you want to agree to, after you've given —

A: I'm not really sure what I'm gonna say, so I'm undecided on what my consent will be, until I've said what I've said. *(laughs)*

FS: Until you've said it. Um, all right. I'm gonna go ahead and let you go. Go ahead and speak.

A: Okay. Um, I think I'm going to start back to who I, where I was as a child.

FS: Okay.

A: I was a child of a teenager who got involved heavily with drugs and alcohol. And we lived with my grandmother. And she would often leave for long periods of time, throughout my childhood. Even when she moved on her own, I was, for long periods of time, with my grandmother. Nothing formal; she could always come and take me whenever she wanted to. I did see my Tribal Child Welfare file. Don't know if I was supposed to.

FS: When was that?

A: I don't want to say when it was, because then it will give away the caseworker that allowed me to see it.

FS: Sure. Okay.

A: But, the caseworker did allow me to see it; it was one of my co-workers. I saw that at a very young age, my grandmother started making referrals about my mother's behavior. Nobody ever took her serious, um, and I was always put back into that situation of being with my mother when she wanted to have me around, regardless of where she was or what kind of behavior was going on. My grandmother had no rights to me. She could take care of me when she was allowed to, and only when she was allowed to. So, put me in many unsafe situations.

As time went on, it continued throughout my childhood. I would be left with other people, because she wouldn't want my grandmother to have me. And those were also unsafe situations. Um, and until my mother had her second child, I was 13. I think I was 13. Twelve or 13. We both ended up being taken into custody. I don't know if it was because there was a baby now, too, or if there were different Child Welfare workers, or what the story was. But, we were both taken into custody. And I can remember the fear, because every child that had ever been taken into custody that I knew, was sent away. So when my grandmother told me, 'You don't have to go back to your mother's. You're in foster care now.' I said, 'Okay, I'm going to run away,' because I thought that meant I'd have to go away. And she assured me that I could stay there and that Peggy couldn't come and take me. So, we were only in foster care for about — I went into foster care on February 8 of '88, and we were only in foster care for a short time.

FS: With your grandmother or with somebody else?

A: I was with my grandmother. I got to stay with my grandmother. And I wish I had always got to stay with my grandmother. I wished that nobody had waited. I wished that the caseworker wouldn't, because I saw the records, wouldn't take that I was just a bad kid. Because that was the excuse that she used, that I was hard to handle, or you know, basically the reason she didn't take care of me was because it was my fault. I mean, and the caseworker noted that. And I think every kid should get to see their file. And I think every caseworker should, and maybe not when they're a child, but when they're an adult and they want to see it, that's their history, that's their story and there might be things in there that they don't remember



but it's still part of who they are. And, you know, if they're ready and they want to see that, that should be up to them. I did contact the State, because there were many references to, um, referrals made to the State, and nobody ever got back to me. Because I wanted to see it. And when I asked, they were just kind of silent and said, 'We don't know,' and 'Somebody would get back to me.' I only made that call twice because, I just did. I only made it twice.

Living the way I, or growing up the way that I grew up, was not okay. [00:05:22.06] I'm fortunate because, um, that pattern began and ended with my mother. She's not who I am. She's not who my grandmother was. And I know that my grandmother probably — only because I was told by my mother how horrible my grandmother was. Well, she wasn't horrible with me. And she wasn't an alcoholic or abusive or any of that, with all of her three children. The only alcoholic child she has is my mother. So, I, um, was in foster care for that time, and then, as I was too old to be a concern anymore, I was on my own very young. And then —

FS: How old?

A: Eighteen. I mean, like, not terribly young, but I mean —

FS: — Right. Legally.

A: Legally — When I could be on my own, I was gone. Because I was the babysitter and because she had another child shortly after. So, then I had my two sisters who have never been my sisters, they've always been more of my own children. And, um, as they got older, and the drinking and patterns continued, I would make referrals to the department. Nobody ever took me serious. She would leave them home alone. I would go get them and bring them to, with me, so they were not alone, so they were fed. Nobody ever took any of my referrals serious. I knew I was doing the right thing by making these referrals, because it's not right. You know? Kids aren't left without food or supervision. My grandmother called. The first time she ever called and made a referral, the next day the kids were in custody. Um, the first time they went in custody, I thought, 'Well, if I don't take them, their mother will get her shit together.' And she did, but it was short-lived like it always was, and they ended up back in custody. [00:07:40.23] My grandmother took them, and then I ended up with one of them during that time, because there wasn't a lot of support.

FS: One was placed with you?

A: One was placed with me. One was more difficult than the other. My grandmother was old, you know, so I said I would take the more difficult of the two girls. And, um, I didn't get a lot of support. Like, even simple things, like, everything was bought out of the foster care. Just because she was in foster care didn't mean that I would buy her second-hand clothes. You know? She needed to be provided for. So nobody knew. She was telling people she was my

daughter (*laughs*) and some of her teachers in high school — At that time, she was in high school. I got her in middle school and had her through high school. Very fortunate that both my sisters are two stable — They are college graduates, productive adults. One has, I think she has — Both of them have different personalities that you can say developed out of the life they lived. One wants to save the world, um, and the other is, is afraid to get too close to anyone. So, that's difficult to know that you just couldn't nurture her enough to make her feel comfortable. Um. So, okay, back to the not much support. Didn't get much support, because it was my family anyway, so —

FS: What do you mean by not much support?

A: From the department.

FS: Okay.

(knock on door)

FS: Is this okay?

A: Yeah, it's okay.

FS: Hi, Rachel.

RG: Hi.

A: Hi. *(smiles)*

END OF FIRST VIDEO

PART TWO

FS: You were talking about?

A: So, just not very supportive. It was always — We've had changes in the administration at the department. I worked at the department, so it was very easy for me to say, 'Is it possible to get help with a scientific calculator that my sister needs for her honors math class?' 'No, you get foster care payments.' Well, the week's worth of payment was less than the calculator was, you know? And she wouldn't take school lunch. We bought. And she was very particular and, you know, that's how I would be for my own children. So that's how it was for her. She wanted; she got. So, not just financially, but even, um, she had to — She was a bit of a hypochondriac, so we went to the doctor — specialized doctors — a lot. So, um, I had not only to take my leave time in order to do that, but I was the only one to take her, whereas I see that — Caseworkers take [*coughs* Sorry.] kids or do for kids. You know, winter coats, boots, all, you know, sports, played sports year-round. The rides to the late nights, taking my kids



with me to pick up, go to sporting events. If my kid or my sisters did sports, I was there to support them. Through all of that there was no kind of support, even to — I took leave time in order to do that. So.

FS: Caseworker wouldn't or didn't?

A: It wasn't the caseworker. It was the higher. So the support, so talking about the support, I also would do back-up Child Welfare in my department and, um, also support the caseworker. And there were times that we had cases when the director would leave. We'd be in the middle of something on a Friday night. Nobody had had lunch or dinner. And, we were working, um, with a family, who at this point, because of sexual abuse that was discovered — So, we have a family in crisis, we have hungry people, we have caseworkers who haven't had lunch or dinner. It's nine o'clock at night; nobody even calls to see if we're done. They left because it was 4:30. Pushed in their chair and went. That's not part of my job description, but because I was part of a team, I felt that, you know, my place was to stay with my coworker and see them through and support them. And then, you know, nobody ever made sure that we debriefed or got counseling.

Some of the things that we heard were horrible. [00:03:18.04] And difficult and, um, you know, we experienced not just vicarious trauma — We were fortunate enough to have each other to talk to and get through that, but I don't feel like that's really the right way that should have been done. We should have had not just supervision, but support. So, that's all I can really think of because, I mean, I don't know that you guys want to know the details of what I experienced as a child and why you should have taken me long before you did. Because, I mean, just the fact that nobody ever listened. Nobody ever spoke to me as a child. I never had a caseworker speak to me and see, you know, what it was being said. I don't even think teachers made referrals, because at a very young age, I was able to take care of myself, and at a very young age, I did a lot of the parenting. Shutting off the stereo and sending the drunks out of my house because I had school the next day.

There was one time when I was, I think I was five or six, and my mother had gotten OUI. And we went to the courthouse for her to pay her fine. And, um, she didn't have the money to pay her fine, and she thought by taking her child with her that it would, you know, help in some way. Well, they arrested her. (*short laugh*) [00:05:16.09] And when they arrested her, I took off, because I thought they were going to arrest me. I didn't know. But I ended up walking around downtown Bangor, and I found somebody I knew and I got a ride back to the island. And I showed up at my grandmother's house. And I said, 'I'm gonna stay with you. They arrested Peggy.' They arrested my mother. And, um, she was like, 'Oh, okay.' And Peggy was yelling, 'You can't arrest me! I have my kid with me!' Nobody paid attention. That, I mean, granted that was like 1979, 1980 but still, maybe they should have paid attention to the fact that there was a little kid right there. And not let me take off. And I looked at my — As my children grew up, I would remember experiences in my life and think, 'My God. Here's my

six-year-old, and I won't let them cross the street by themselves, let alone walk around Bangor and find a ride back to the island.' [00:06:33.18]

A: So, I feel like I'm lucky to be here. I'm lucky that emotionally I'm not, I don't have bipolar or depression or any mental health issues. I have, I'm a productive adult who works and mothered my children and my sisters and even my mother until I was 30 years old. I would take her to rehab every time she wanted to go. I would pay for her bills why she was in rehab. I drove her to rehabs around the country and paid for her bills and sent her money for cigarettes, and took care of her the entire time, with the understanding that, you know, you're going to do it this time. Well, I wasn't quite 30 yet. I was 29, and I said, 'This is it. This is the last time I'm doing it.' And, um, that *was* the last time I did it. And since then, I don't have a relationship with her, because I chose myself and my children. Because I didn't want my children to go through the: 'Where is she? Is she okay?' Many times as a child, I thought she was dead, because it would be weeks before I'd see her and nobody would take me. Nobody took me away from her, even though she wouldn't be around for weeks and my grandmother legally had no rights. I mean, if something were to happen to me, would she have been able to get me the care that I needed?

FS: Would you be living with your grandmother during those times, usually?

A: Yes.

FS: Okay.

A: Or, when my sister and I were taken into care, um, we were left for a couple days. I took care of the baby for a couple days, and then the weekend was over. And the next day was school, and so I was like, 'I'm not going to be able to go to school if I have the baby.' So I called her babysitter because Peggy was working at the time. Or, yeah, she had been working. She lost her job when she started, um, drinking again, and I asked the babysitter, 'Can I bring the baby to you, because I need to go to my grandmother's, so I can go to school tomorrow.' And the babysitter was like, 'Of course.' Because they loved Olivia, because, you know, she was a cute, good little baby. So, um. And that's when, you know, we were finally taken into care, but before that, nobody. And I was alone with the baby. I mean, a 13-year-old little girl with a baby? No. I mean, not for days. And it was a couple days; started on a Friday night and by Sunday night, I was like, 'I gotta go to school.' So that — To think that I really wanted to go to school. *(laughs)* Because it's kinda crazy. [00:09:45.21]

FS: Wow. You know, you're welcome to share anything, when you said you didn't know what else we would want. So it's really whatever stories, whatever —

A: I really don't. I really don't. I mean, there are many things. To the fact that she'd be partying at parties and she would've brought me with her, but I'd end up getting left wherever. And I would wake up and she'd be gone. And, you know, four o'clock in the morning, and it's still dark out, and I'm walking home alone by myself, because I've woken up and she's not there. And nobody ever thought that it was, um, to the degree where I shouldn't, you know. And the only — And a lot of times, my grandparents thought, 'Well if she would just leave her here,

she can still get the TANF or AFDC,' at that time. She can still have that, if she would just ... But she wouldn't just leave me there. She would leave me for a little while or she'd get in a fight with them. It was to punish them that she would take me away, because she knew that my grandmother would worry, because I was often in unsafe situations. [00:11:09.20]

(pause)

FS: And you know that you're amazingly resilient.

A: Well you know, the one thing I did discover about myself not too long ago, is that because I had no gauge for normal, I felt like, and in my parenting and in my home life and even the perception that what I thought was normal had to be perfect. So, for a long time, I stressed myself out about making sure everything was just the way it needed to be. And now I know that perfection is not normal. And I discovered that on my own and that felt good to be able to say. It doesn't need to be perfect. And my daughter is 19 and she is in her sophomore year at college. And last year, her freshman year, she was living on campus. And she'd come home to eat dinner with us one or two times a week. And one night, we were waiting for her father to get home, because he was cooking dinner. (smiles) And, um, we were just snuggling on the couch, and she said to me, 'You know, mama, you and daddy did a good job.' And that might not seem like a lot, but —

FS: That's huge.

A: It was huge. (smiles)

FS: Yeah. Good on you. Anything else you want to share?

A: I can't really think of anything.

FS: Okay. One of the things we'd like to ask is, um, in your mind, what does reconciliation mean? What would you like to see, um, in terms of, you know, you've spoken the truth, and this other piece is reconciliation. What would you like to see as a part of your participation?

A: Um. The kids need to matter. It's not just about meeting the parent where they're at. A lot of times, you hear people say that the kids always want to be with their parents. No, they don't. (brief laugh) I didn't. That wasn't where I wanted to be. I wanted to be with my grandmother and grandfather, because I was safe. [00:13:48.17] And I think that, no matter when you experience what you experience, I think that you should be able to see your records. Those are yours. Those are about you. I don't, you know — It doesn't need to be confidential from the person who it was about. You lived it.

FS: Is that the policy now?

A: I don't know. Nobody ever — And the caseworker at the time said, 'Go ahead.' So, for me, it validated how much my grandmother loved me, and *(nods)*

FS: Wonderful.

A: Yeah.

FS: Anything else?

A: I don't think so.

FS: Okay. I'm just gonna state that, um, it is March 28, 2014 and this is the Wabanaki — I'm sorry — the Penobscot, um, Community Center, what — ?

A: Nick Sapiel Building. *(laughs)*

FS: Okay. Where this interview is taking place.

[END OF RECORDING]